

## **“You don’t want to hurt his feelings...”: Family Leisure as a Context for Intergenerational Ambivalence**

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### **Abstract**

Family leisure has been found to be both consensual and conflictual. Research on family leisure has focused mainly on heterosexual married couples with young children and has excluded the voices of older adults. Framed by the model of intergenerational ambivalence (Luscher & Pillemer, 1998), this interpretive study developed an understanding of the role of intergenerational ambivalence in the experience of intergenerational family leisure for grandparents and their adult grandchildren. Fourteen dyads of grandparents and adult grandchildren were interviewed individually and were asked to describe their experience of intergenerational family leisure. Using grounded theory methods, the interviews provided valuable insight into the role that intergenerational ambivalence plays in the experience of family leisure. We suggest that the intergenerational ambivalence model is a useful framework for the study of intergenerational family leisure.

*KEYWORDS: Family leisure, intergenerational ambivalence, grandparents, grandchildren*

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Authors Note: This work was supported by a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada awarded to the first author. We gratefully acknowledge all of the grandparents and grandchildren who shared their stories with us, as well as the reviewers of the draft of this article.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Congress on Leisure Research, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, May 14, 2008.

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## Introduction

Leisure activities play an important role in the lives of families, among couples, in parent-child relations, and in grandparent-grandchild relations (Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994; Menec & Chipperfield, 1997; Norris, Kuiack, & Pratt, 2004; Szinovacz & Davey, 2001, 2004). Societal norms related to family leisure have espoused a variety of benefits, one of the most common being the old adage, "The family that plays together, stays together" (Wearing, 1993, p. 25). The bulk of family related leisure research has focused on these benefits, including improved communication among family members, higher quality of family relationships, and enhanced family cohesiveness and strength (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2002; Orthner & Mancini, 1990; Palmer, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2007). Recently, however, approaches to the theorizing and study of family leisure have been challenged. A number of researchers have questioned the traditional definition of family as a heterosexual couple with young children (Allen, Fine, & Demo, 2000; Cohler & Altergott, 1995) and family leisure as an experience without some level of conflict (Freysinger, 1997; Shaw, 1992, 1997; Shaw & Dawson, 2003; te Kloeze, 1999, Trussell & Shaw, 2007). This has led to a critical analysis of underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions that influence epistemological and ontological approaches to the study of family leisure.

Family leisure has come to refer primarily to "time that parents and children spend together in free time or recreational activities" (Shaw, 1997, p. 98). Research focusing specifically on family leisure has largely excluded the voices of older adults. Mancini and Sandifer (1995) note that the "nexus of the family and leisure realms for aging people is neither clearly conceptualized nor adequately explored" (p. 132). Increasing longevity indicates that a better understanding of grandparent-grandchild relationships is warranted. Grandparents and grandchildren could experience benefits from family leisure, including improved communication among family members, higher quality of family relationships, and enhanced family cohesiveness. Similarly, negative experiences also likely exist, including conflict in the family that arises out of the leisure experience. Ambivalence related to the grandparent role may also play a part in the experience of family leisure for grandparents and grandchildren (Scraton & Holland, 2006).

The purpose of this inductive study, therefore, was to understand the role of intergenerational ambivalence in the experience of intergenerational family leisure for grandparents and their adult grandchildren. Although Shaw (1997) has suggested that family leisure is "time that parents and children spend together in free time or recreational activities" (p. 98), based on the social constructionist approach to the current study, we have expanded this definition and have defined intergenerational family leisure for the purpose of this study as *the experience of time spent together by grandparents and grandchildren in free time or recreational activities*. In accordance with the tenets of interpretive research, the participants' meanings and perceptions of what constitutes free time or recreation were used as the basis for understanding the process.

## Theoretical Approach

The current study utilizes a social constructionist approach to the study of intergenerational family leisure. This approach conceives of knowledge not as being discovered, but rather as being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Berger & Luckman, 1967). Individuals construct meaning out of their interactions as individuals with the social world (Gergen, 1985). In using a social constructionist approach, we have attempted to interpret and make sense of the experience of intergenerational family leisure as constructed by grandparents and their adult grandchildren. Specifically, social constructionism is a useful lens for understanding human behavior, focusing on the substantial influence that culture and social structure has on an individual's construction of meaning (Geertz, 1973). This approach is fruitful in attempting to understand the experience of multiple generations within a family system.

The current study was also guided theoretically by research on both family leisure and intergenerational family relations. The purpose of this literature review is to serve as a basis for theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in the design and implementation of an inductive study of the experience of ambivalence in intergenerational family leisure. Theoretical sensitivity reflects the researcher's awareness of the subtleties of the data and the connections between theoretical concepts and the participants' experiences. Becoming sensitive to concepts in the existing literature helps the researcher to see possibilities in the data, establish connections among concepts, and ask questions that help to clarify these connections. In order to enhance the theoretical sensitivity in this study, the following review of the literature will identify sensitizing concepts that have given initial ideas to pursue in the research (Blumer, 1969). Consistent with Charmaz (2006), these sensitizing concepts have acted as "points of departure" (p. 16) that have guided the development of the research questions, interview questions, and analysis of the data.

With respect to family leisure, one predominant theme relates to the notion that participating in leisure activities together as a family will positively influence family cohesion and will foster psychological well-being (Orthner, Barnett-Morris, & Mancini, 1994). Despite these normative assumptions, family members may not all experience the family leisure activity in the same way (Havitz, 2007; Larson, Gillman, & Richards, 1997). In response to the evidence of the dialectical aspects of family leisure, Shaw (1997) suggested that a contradictory theory of family leisure would be useful. She suggests that, in understanding family leisure, researchers must be sensitive to both the positive and negative aspects of the experience.

Drawing from the field of gerontology, the intergenerational ambivalence model (Luscher & Pillemer, 1998) has drawn attention to the increasing acknowledgement that relationships within families inherently involve *both* consensus and conflict (Beaton, Norris, & Pratt, 2003; Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1995; Luscher, 2002). Intergenerational ambivalence, as defined by Luscher and Pillemer (1998) relates to the experience of contradictions in relationships between parents and offspring. This concept includes contradictions at both the level of social structure, including institutional resources and requirements, such as statuses,

roles, and norms, and at the subjective level, in terms of cognitions, emotions, and motivations (Luscher & Pillemer, 1998). More specifically, Luscher (2000) states that ambivalence exists when “dilemmas and polarizations of feelings, thoughts, actions, and, furthermore, contradictions in social relations and social structures, which are relevant for personal and societal development, are interpreted as being basically irreconcilable” (p. 16). The intergenerational ambivalence framework, therefore, moves away from theorizing about the typical ‘love-hate relationship’ (Luscher, 2000) and toward an understanding of the complexity of intergenerational relations. The emphasis in this model is not solely on conflict, but reflects the simultaneous existence of both positive and negative thoughts and emotions that can not be reconciled.

Lastly, the concept of intergenerational stake is also important to consider when studying grandparent-grandchild relationships. Bengtson and Kuypers (1971) originally conceived of the developmental stake hypothesis and suggested that parents perceive their relationship with their children more positively than the children do. Parents have been found to overstate solidarity and minimize conflict in their relationships with their children. Although originally hypothesized as a developmental difference between parents and children, this phenomenon has extended beyond its original hypothesis and holds true, not only for grandparents and their adult children, but also for grandparents and grandchildren (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Silverstein, & Wang, 2000; Silverstein, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 2003). These findings suggest that this stake is a result of generational effects rather than contrasts in individual life course development levels (Giarrusso, Feng, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 2001) and has resulted in a shift away from the developmental stake hypothesis toward the concept of intergenerational stake. Grandparents are thought, by virtue of greater resources and their lineage position in the family, to invest more than their grandchildren in their intergenerational relationship.

Based on the limitations of the existing research related to the involvement of older adults in family leisure, as well as the theoretical parallels among Shaw’s (1997) contradictory theory of family leisure and Luscher and Pillemer’s (1998) intergenerational ambivalence framework, it became apparent that research needed to focus more closely on the experience of family leisure among multiple generations.

### Methodology

A social constructionist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) was the methodology used to guide the analysis of the findings. For the purpose of the current study, this inductive process reflects the co-construction of the experience of family leisure, based on the interaction between the multiple realities of both the participants and the researchers. Charmaz’s (2006) social constructionist approach to grounded theory differs from Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) original conception and Strauss and Corbin’s (1994) revised approach. Charmaz moves away from the more objective approach espoused by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and approaches grounded theory from a social constructionist standpoint. This approach recognizes the social context of experiences and acknowledges the active process of generating meaning that occurs between the researcher and the participant

(Charmaz, 2006). In this approach, theory may be generated initially from the data or elaborated upon, if pre-existing theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation (Strauss, 1987). The final stage of the study provides an explanation of the experience of ambivalence among grandparents and adult grandchildren, integrating the findings with the concepts of intergenerational ambivalence and intergenerational stake.

### *Data Collection*

Dyads of adult grandchildren, age 18-25, and one grandparent were recruited through undergraduate classes at a midsize university in Southern Ontario, Canada and through snowball sampling in the community. Grandchildren were eligible to participate in the study if they were between the ages of 18-25 and had a grandparent who was also willing to participate in the study. No age requirements were placed on the grandparents.

All of the grandchildren and the grandparents were living in Southern Ontario, which facilitated in-person interviews. Grandparents and grandchildren were interviewed separately. All interviews were conducted by the first author. An attempt was made to recruit equal numbers of male and female grandchildren, although as is typical in social science research, more female grandchildren agreed to participate than males. The grandchildren chose which grandparent (if they had more than one) that they invited to participate in the study. The grandchildren were informed only that the study was about family leisure among grandparents and grandchildren.

The study included 14 grandparent-grandchild dyads (N=30). These dyads included ten female grandchildren and four male grandchildren. The sex of the grandparents was balanced with eight grandmothers and eight grandfathers participating. There were two more grandparents than grandchildren who participated because in two instances, both the grandmother and grandfather chose to participate in the interview. These grandparents felt that participation by both grandmother and grandfather was important, viewing themselves as a collective grandparent unit. The decision was made to include both grandparents in these two instances because of the study's focus on the broad context of grandparent-grandchild relations. In all of the interviews in the study, participants were asked to speak specifically about their grandparent/grandchild who was participating in the study, but the participants were also encouraged to speak about all of their grandparents/grandchildren in order to develop a broad understanding of their families. Participants were asked to describe the time they spent together in free time or recreational activities and were asked to reflect upon both the positive and negative aspects of these experiences. These interviews were audio-recorded, with participant consent, and then transcribed verbatim. Detailed fieldnotes and a reflective journal were maintained throughout this process, the data from which further informed the emergent understanding of participants' experiences. Participation in the study was strictly confidential and pseudonyms have been used in the data presented here to ensure that confidentiality was maintained.

### **Data Analysis**

Using a social constructionist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), all data were coded by the first author. This method consisted of initial, line-by-line coding, focused coding, raising codes to categories, and theorizing based on these categories and grounded in the experiences of the participants (Charmaz, 2004). Data were systematically compared to the current literature on family leisure and intergenerational relations. Keeping analytic memos throughout the analysis was essential in moving beyond descriptions and concepts, to theorizing about the experience. These memos helped to keep a record of the analytic process and also included verbatim material from the participants to help illustrate the researcher's thought processes. Memo writing also focused on comparing categories both within and among participants. Consultation between both authors occurred throughout the analysis process and facilitated the development of the final categories and theoretical integration of the findings with the current literature.

Throughout the process of data analysis, the researcher was sensitive to negative cases within the data. Negative case analysis was an important technique for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative analysis. It can be viewed as a "process of revising hypotheses with hindsight" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 309) and focuses attention on incidents that seem to contradict the majority of the findings in the data. This process helped to refine the themes and hypotheses in the study until there was confidence that all known cases had been addressed.

In order to facilitate the development of categories and comparison of codes applicable to each category, data were stored and organized using the QSR NVivo software package. All data, including transcripts and fieldnotes were analyzed and participants' responses were coded using the coding strategy outlined previously.

The final stage of the data analysis involved the theoretical integration of the categories that emerged from the data. The findings of the study have been integrated theoretically and empirically with the current body of literature on intergenerational relations and family leisure, including the concepts of intergenerational ambivalence and intergenerational stake.

### **Findings**

Family leisure, in the current sample, was a common experience and was central to the development of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. These leisure pursuits facilitated the establishment of common interests and experiences that, in turn, enabled the development of strong intergenerational bonds between grandparents and grandchildren. The time spent together involved in leisure pursuits provided an invaluable opportunity to, as the participants said, '*get to know one another better*'. These family leisure experiences reflected both benefits and challenges associated with the intergenerational relationship. The findings presented here first illustrate the role of family leisure in the intergenerational relationship and then illustrate the ambivalence that was apparent in these family interactions.

### *The Role of Family Leisure in the Intergenerational Relationship*

The bulk of time spent together among grandparents and adult grandchildren was spent engaged in some form of family leisure. Both grandparents and grandchildren felt that leisure encompassed almost everything that they did together. For example, one grandmother said:

Well my life is all leisure. I don't work. So I don't have to do anything I don't want to do and stress about anything which I can't do because of my health. So whenever she [granddaughter] comes to me it's just a pleasure. (Martha, grandmother)

Grandchildren felt similarly, as evident from this granddaughter's reflection.

Well, yeah, if I say that leisure is the time that we spend catching up and having family dinners, that's our whole relationship. Our whole relationship is based around our leisure time together, because we don't do any work together. I mean, their whole lives are leisure, in my opinion, so, yeah. (Lisa, granddaughter)

Participating in family leisure played a key role in the development of close relationships in the grandparents and grandchildren in this study. Leisure activities were seen as an important place for grandparents and grandchildren to develop common interests and share experiences. These experiences then provided a basis for the development of a close bond between the generations. One grandfather reflected on the opportunity he had to get to know his grandchildren through participating in leisure together, saying:

Yeah, I think that is pretty important and it would be unusual for a grandparent and a grandchild to know very much about each other or have much impact or for them to even remember very much without being able to share activities. (Bernie, grandfather)

One granddaughter spoke about the role that leisure played in developing her family history and facilitating a sense of shared memories. This helped her to feel close to her grandmother despite the fact that they lived far apart and saw each other only once or twice a year.

Face to face and also to be used like I guess like a bond kind of throughout the years where you can reflect and be like do you remember like that game where I won the first time or you know she will say I taught you twenty-one and you couldn't count to twenty-one. Just like little things like that. So it think leisure - I guess it brings us together because it is shared memories. (Catherine, granddaughter)

By experiencing leisure together as a family, grandparents and grandchildren developed strong bonds because of the knowledge they gained about each other through their leisure. Although the types of activities that occur during family leisure time may not always be the favorite activities of either the grandparents or grandchildren, both generations valued the learning and the bonding that oc-

curred, often unexpectedly, as a result of these experiences. This purposive use of family leisure is illustrated in one grandson's reflection of his leisure experiences with his grandparents.

I think that you, you strengthen your family ties. You strengthen your own knowledge and you increase like your ability to relate to them. So like each time you go it gets better. I think that you find things out about yourself you didn't know as far as like things you might enjoy because they expose you to things you wouldn't necessarily do yourself. (Aaron, grandson)

Family leisure, therefore, provided an opportunity for families to gather together and learn about each other's interests. In spending leisure time together, grandparents and grandchildren developed an understanding of each other's personalities and cultivated an emotional bond with each other. This resulted in a cyclical relationship between emotional closeness and leisure time: time together facilitated a close bond and having a close bond encouraged grandparents and grandchildren to spend more time together.

### *Ambivalence in the Intergenerational Family Leisure Experience*

The descriptions of intergenerational family leisure highlight the complexity of intergenerational relationships and the emotions, cognitions, and social norms that influence the experience of family leisure and exemplified intergenerational ambivalence. In analyzing the participants' descriptions of their family leisure and their intergenerational relationships, the following four themes emerged in relation to ambivalence in the experience of intergenerational family leisure: differing expectations of leisure among grandparents and grandchildren; struggling to acknowledge contradictions; linking feelings of ambivalence and investment in the intergenerational relationship; and changing patterns of ambivalence among grandchildren.

#### *Differing expectations of leisure among grandparents and grandchildren*

Family leisure provided a context for both consensus and conflict. The relationship between leisure and ambivalence is complex and appears to be linked to the way in which the participants defined leisure. Family leisure, like much research indicates, is rarely as freely chosen and intrinsically motivated as individual leisure pursuits. In the current study, when the grandparents and grandchildren were able to reasonably compromise about the types of activities in which they would participate, as well as the amount of time that they would engage in these activities, they were better able to cope with the conflicts and challenges of family leisure. Grandparents and grandchildren who experienced the time that they spent together as more obligatory and not mutually beneficial, tended to report more difficulty managing the ambivalence in their family leisure experiences. When the participants were able to perceive benefits that they would gain from participating in family leisure, they were better able to manage the ambivalence that existed in their relationship.

Grandchildren's ambivalence was minimized when they felt that they had learned something from their grandparents or that they had gained a sense of

their family history through their leisure experience. One grandson reflected on the challenge of meeting his own expectations about his leisure time with his grandparents. For him, the uncertainty of the outcome of the experience of family leisure garnered feelings of ambivalence about initiating these activities together.

Most days when I go over and spend time with them, I'll be really excited and then I'll get there and be disappointed with the conversations we have. Or I'll be really unexcited and get there and be excited by the things that we do. So yeah, a lot of times it's neither here nor there you know. I think in the leisure stuff that we do together, there is a lot less ambivalence. I don't know if I can even say that - like a lot of times those leisure activities we do together get sprung on you, you know. You'll come over and grandma will say that she has to make like six pies and asks you if you can help. So you end up doing something with her that you weren't expecting and it ends up being a positive. But you start out and you're like 'oh my gosh'. (Aaron, grandson)

There was significant ambivalence about initiating family leisure with their grandparents, but when the grandchildren were able to perceive the benefits that they gained through the experience, the ambivalence was more manageable. Although the conflictual thoughts and emotions still existed, the beneficial outcome of the family leisure experience outweighed the challenges and motivated the grandchildren to continue their involvement with their grandparents.

Not all intergenerational family leisure experiences were viewed in such a positive light, nor did all grandparent-grandchild dyads experience harmonious intergenerational family leisure. In these instances, participating in leisure together resulted in increased tension rather than cohesion. This was most apparent when grandparents and grandchildren viewed their personalities and their leisure preferences as dissimilar and uncomplimentary. The greatest ambivalence and, consequently, resistance to family leisure emerged when grandparents and grandchildren perceived that they possessed different moral values and beliefs that could not be reconciled. One granddaughter spoke strongly about the ambivalence she experienced in participating in leisure in the community with her grandfather.

Good and bad? I'd say yeah. He is family and I should be seeing him. We have fun with some of the stuff we do with him. Sometimes he's just weird. It's bad but um like some of the ...I think that as he gets older, he gets less concerned about being socially ... he doesn't really care and he can be kind of embarrassing. We'll be out and he will just act weird. For all his faults I do love him. Sometimes it is hard to like him I guess. (Natasha, granddaughter)

These relationships and leisure experiences reflect the old adage 'the family that plays together, stays together'. Despite differences in values and leisure interests, grandparents and grandchildren both felt that it was expected that they should still be able to achieve a sense of solidarity through contact and participation in leisure activities. When these activities failed to produce the desired benefits, ambivalence was heightened.

### *Struggling to acknowledge contradictions*

Initially, most of the participants indicated that they generally had very positive, close relationships with their grandparent/grandchild and did not perceive significant challenges in their family leisure. For example, one granddaughter reflected positively on her experiences with her grandmother, saying:

I'm not typically negative. If she says something that's kind of ignorant, I might tell her it's not appropriate, but I don't really get mad at her, I don't think there's a lot of negative feelings towards her. But, there's definitely mostly positive feelings. (Laura, granddaughter)

As the interviews progressed, some grandparents were able to articulate the ambivalence that they experienced in the leisure time they spent with their grandchildren. They spoke about the challenge of being responsible for their grandchildren, especially since many of the grandparents provided a significant level of care for their grandchildren when they were young. One grandmother, for example, struggled to give an example of ambivalence, but then told an elaborate story about her granddaughter when she was a child and described how the granddaughter repeatedly injured herself as she was playing while the grandmother was looking after her. At the conclusion of the story, the grandmother stated: "I still think of the pain that girl suffered. I could have done without her then" (Martha, grandmother).

The grandparents spoke of ambivalence mainly in this way and usually gave examples of the challenges that occurred while engaged in family leisure. They struggled with having different beliefs or opinions than their grandchildren while, at the same time, 'not interfering' and choosing not to make their own opinions known to their grandchildren.

I guess at times when they do things we regard as what we wouldn't do ourselves. We sometimes have to draw back and keep your mouths shut. It's not your business. Something like that we regard as crass like modern music. Like tattoos. (Ken, grandfather)

Much of the ambivalence expressed by the grandparents emerged in the relationship between grandparent and parent, rather than the grandparent-grandchild relationship. The grandparents' ambivalence related to the challenges they experienced in assuming the role of grandparents, as opposed to that of a parent. They spoke candidly about allowing their own children to be parents and to make the mistakes that the grandparents themselves had made as parents.

In some situations I try to stay on the outside and let our two children do their thing. Sometimes you want to step in and tell them this is wrong, you shouldn't be doing this. But you have to let them find their way like I found mine. And depending what's going on in their life, I will be more emphatic in what I think they should be doing depending on where they are. (Joseph, grandfather)

The grandparents did not express strong feelings of ambivalence about finding the time to participate in family leisure. Rather, their ambivalence was more strongly connected to the way that they participated in the family leisure. They struggled to remove themselves from a parental role and embrace a less authoritative, more fun-seeking grandparent role.

***Linking feelings of ambivalence and investment in the intergenerational relationship***

Grandchildren discussed substantially more ambivalence than their grandparents did. This ambivalence was related to differences in personality and different expectations in both the relationship and the types of leisure that they liked to engage in. One granddaughter reflected on the challenge of her grandfather's frequent, unannounced visits and his repeated requests to engage in family leisure with his grandchildren. When asked if she experienced ambivalence in her experience of family leisure with her grandfather, she clearly stated:

Yes a lot. The whole stopping in every day is kind of challenging some times or umm sometimes he tries to do things that he thinks you want him to do or he thinks you would appreciate. You don't want to hurt his feelings so you just kind of ... (Maggie, granddaughter)

Another grandson reflected on the discrepant feelings and thoughts he experienced when visiting with his grandfather.

I mean, certainly there is times where I'll disagree with him and simultaneously know that he's got a lot of knowledge and there's a lot of learning and everything. And yet I strongly believe he's wrong in that one particular case. So I think there is some of those contradictory feelings. (Brandon, grandson)

The grandchildren were willing to accept this ambivalence because they highly valued the opportunity to learn from their grandparents through participating in leisure together. Their approach to family leisure with their grandparents was a purposive one. They tempered their feelings of ambivalence by focusing on the benefits that they achieved by participating in family leisure with their grandparents.

These discussions of ambivalence reflected the intergenerational stake phenomenon, whereby grandchildren experienced more ambivalence when they perceived that they were investing less effort in their relationship than their grandparents were. One granddaughter described this discrepancy, saying:

I feel like every time she sees me she's genuinely happy to see me and she wants to know what I'm doing, and when I come home I just want to go to my room, put my stuff away. But I have that sense of obligation to acknowledge their presence, basically, which isn't asking a lot at all, but I know that I have that attitude of, like, hi. And she's, hi, how was your day, what have you been doing? (Lisa, granddaughter)

In reflecting upon their feelings of obligation, grandchildren also spoke of a substantial amount of conflict that they experienced in trying to balance leisure

time with their friends and family leisure with their grandparents. Interestingly, the grandchildren perceived that their grandparents were extremely disappointed in the lack of time that their grandchildren spent with them. The grandparents, however, did not admit to being as strongly affected as the grandchildren thought. Although the grandparents admitted that they would welcome more time with their grandchildren, they acknowledged the time conflict that the grandchildren were experiencing and were very understanding of the pressures that the grandchildren were facing. For example, one grandmother reflected:

I hope we don't make them feel they owe us to come in and talk to us because when they get home here, a lot of their friends want to get in touch with them so I know that is a priority with them. (Val, grandmother)

Some of the grandparents even commented that spending more time together would potentially cause additional conflict and ambivalence, noting that time apart helped to preserve the positive feelings associated with the relationship. Grandchildren also admitted that their grandparents were accepting of the limited time spent together and that they were not constantly pressuring the grandchildren to spend more time with them. The grandchildren, nonetheless, felt that their grandparents would be happier if they spent more time together and, consequently, experienced intergenerational stake and ambivalence in their family leisure experiences. This appears, therefore, to be more affected by the grandchildren's perceptions of societal norms related to filial obligation in the grandparent-grandchild relationship than a reflection of pressure by the grandparents in this study. This normative experience of obligation was often reflected in statements about the notion that the grandchildren 'should' spend more time with their grandparents.

The experience of intergenerational stake and the ensuing ambivalence was related to the emotional closeness of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. Most of the participants reported having close emotional relationships with each other. Some interesting observations emerged, however, when the grandparents and grandchildren were asked to compare closer and more distant relationships. For example, many grandchildren reported having closer relationships and participating more frequently in family leisure with one set of grandparents versus another. They often perceived more ambivalence in their closer relationships and with the grandparents with whom they engaged more frequently in family leisure. One granddaughter compared her ambivalence between her two grandfathers, stating:

I don't feel that obligation to spend time with him or to call him. ... We're not that close, and in my opinion he doesn't even want to be, so I don't feel bad about not wanting to either. (Lisa, granddaughter)

Despite the fact that the grandparents tried not to pressure the grandchildren to participate in family leisure with them, the grandchildren had a normative expectation that they should be engaging in more leisure with their grandparents. When the grandparents and grandchildren had a close relationship and when grandchildren perceived that the grandparents were more invested in the relation-

ship, greater ambivalence was experienced than in more distant relationships with less discrepancy in investment.

### *Changing patterns of ambivalence among grandchildren*

Ambivalence in intergenerational family leisure seemed to fluctuate over the life course. Grandchildren spoke of becoming more critical of grandparents' personalities, values, and opinions as they became adults. When they were children, they were more accepting of their grandparents' knowledge that was often transmitted through participation in family leisure. As teenagers, they began to exert their independence and often reflected on how different they were from their grandparents, not only in their values, but in their leisure preferences. They were focused on fitting in with their peer group and were sometimes embarrassed by their grandparents at this stage in their life. For example, one granddaughter, who had had a very close relationship with her grandparents when she was a child, commented:

Yeah, there was a big change. When I was a teenager, I didn't really want to go over there. If we went to the mall, I was always embarrassed because my grandfather was kind of eccentric and he really likes to talk to people no matter who it is and so I would be so embarrassed. So when I was a teenager, I didn't really spend that much time with them. (Jennifer, granddaughter)

As the grandchildren emerged into adulthood, they became increasingly interested in the knowledge that their grandparents had. Many of the grandchildren had already experienced the death of another grandparent. They were aware of the limited time remaining with their grandparents and wanted to learn as much as they could from them while they still had the opportunity. One grandson spoke about the opportunity to learn how to sail with his grandfather, saying:

So he's going to teach me how to sail and I am really excited about that – to really have that one-on-one time. But it's because of the realization that I do have some pretty special people there to give me knowledge to help me. I know they can. (Jeremy, grandson)

Another granddaughter reflected on her own life stage and the perceived readiness to embrace this knowledge, stating:

I do find it important because I've found that I have learned a lot of things from them actually, like a lot of things about my family that I didn't know. And I think now that I am older that they feel that they can tell me these things. ... So I find it's important to stay in touch with them just because they have so much to teach me. (Jennifer, granddaughter)

This eagerness to learn from their grandparents tempered the ambivalence that the grandchildren experienced in their intergenerational family leisure. It did not eliminate the challenges and conflicts, but the perceived benefits of this engagement, in the form of increased knowledge, motivated the grandchildren to continue to engage in family leisure with their grandparents.

## Discussion

The experiences of the grandparents and adult grandchildren in this study suggest that family leisure played an important role in the intergenerational relationship for both grandparents and grandchildren. The contribution of these findings is to expand the current understanding of family leisure from focusing *either* on consensus or conflict and rather, integrate the intergenerational ambivalence model that emphasizes the co-existence of *both* consensus and conflict. Theoretically, this study also advances our understanding of family leisure by explaining how participating in family leisure can contribute to ambivalence but also how it can help grandchildren cope with the ambivalence they experience in their relationships with their grandparents.

Grandparents and their adult grandchildren reported that participating in leisure activities together allowed the participants to develop a more in-depth knowledge of each other and their personalities and personal histories. These leisure pursuits facilitated the establishment of common interests and experiences which, in turn, enabled the development of strong intergenerational bonds between grandparents and grandchildren. Both grandparents and grandchildren, however, described contradictory thoughts and emotions that they experienced in their time together. Grandchildren expressed significantly more ambivalence than their grandparents did. They perceived substantial benefits from the experience of family leisure with their grandparents but simultaneously experienced significant challenges in this time. This emerged as a contradictory experience that was irreconcilable by the participants. This ambivalence appeared to peak during adolescence and decreased somewhat as the grandchildren emerged into adulthood and began to place greater value on the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

As the grandchildren emerged into adulthood, they used family leisure as an opportunity to learn from their grandparents and to develop a sense of family history together. Family leisure, in this way, was a means for the grandparents and grandchildren to cope with the ambivalence that existed in the intergenerational relationship. When the grandchildren emerged into adulthood and began to value the knowledge that their grandparents had to share, their ambivalence was tempered. The challenges associated with participating in family leisure e.g., time conflict, or differing activity preferences, were not minimized or negated. Rather, they were recognized as a part of the family leisure experience and were accepted as long as the experience resulted in the desired benefit, whether that was enhanced knowledge or the development of a closer bond between grandparent and grandchild. This reflects what Shaw and Dawson (2001) have termed 'purposive leisure'. They have suggested that family leisure for parents of young children (aged 10-12) was purposive, rather than freely chosen or intrinsically motivated. These findings, however, expand this notion of purposive leisure to grandchildren and their experiences with their grandparents.

We also suggest conceptual linkages between intergenerational ambivalence and intergenerational stake and support previous literature that suggests that emotionally close relationships can garner stronger feelings of ambivalence than more distant relationships (e.g., Fingerma, Hay, & Birditt, 2004). Grandchildren who felt less close to their grandparents tended to experience less ambivalence in

their intergenerational relationships and in their experience of family leisure. It appears that when grandchildren perceive their experiences of the relationship to be highly discrepant from the experiences of their grandparents, greater ambivalence results. Given the normative expectations of family cohesiveness and solidarity, this experience of ambivalence may be associated with feelings of guilt and obligation, leading to stress among intergenerational families.

Intergenerational stake appeared most pronounced when the grandchildren were adolescents. This was not surprising given that adolescence is a period in which teens attempt to exert their independence and develop their own sense of identity and autonomy (Erikson, 1950; Steinberg, 1990). As the grandchildren made the transition into adulthood, the gap between the grandparents' and grandchildren's investment in the relationship narrowed dramatically. This finding appears discrepant with previous longitudinal research that has shown little change over time in intergenerational stake (Lynott & Roberts, 1997). It may be that the qualitative methodology employed in the current study facilitated a richer explanation of the complexities of the development of the intergenerational relationship over time. Previous research has focused on the amount of exchange or contact between generations, rather than the affect that accompanies these exchanges (Shapiro, 2004). Survey research has also been restricted in examining only the direction of the stake, and may not have been able to account for variations in the degree of intergenerational stake that is experienced across the lifespan. The current study, therefore, suggests a pattern of ambivalence and intergenerational stake that is fluid and dynamic across the lifespan.

Our findings also support previous findings related to parent-child relationships, whereby ambivalence appears to peak in adolescence and early adulthood and begins to decrease in midlife and continue the downward trend through older adulthood (Fingerman & Hay, 2004). This effect can be linked to Carstensen's (1992) theory of socioemotional selectivity. Proponents of this theory suggest that older adults are strongly motivated by emotional regulation and, therefore, minimize conflict in their lives, often choosing to participate in relationships in which they perceive less ambivalence. It is thought that, by selecting and presenting positive events and/or relationships in the context of their interviews, older adults seek to maximize the positive nature of their experiences and, therefore, optimize their sense of self. This may explain the current findings that suggest that the adult grandchildren express significantly more ambivalence in their relationship than their grandparents do.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Because of the simultaneous consensual and conflictual aspects of family leisure, we suggest that ambivalence is a useful framework for understanding intergenerational family leisure. In utilizing the ambivalence model, it is important to address the intergenerational stake phenomenon which, as we have shown, is linked to the experience of intergenerational ambivalence. When grandchildren perceive that their grandparents have a stronger investment in their relationship than they do, they experience greater ambivalence. This ambivalence results from the grandchildren's inability to reconcile the normative, structural expectations

related to the need to spend time with their grandparents with their need to participate in a variety of other social relationships e.g., peers, romantic partners. The purposive use of family leisure helps grandparents and grandchildren cope with the ambivalence that they experience. Although conflict and consensus both exist and are irreconcilable, grandparents and grandchildren were better able to deal with the ambivalence that they experienced when they perceived the benefits that resulted from the family leisure experience.

The findings from this study and the ensuing theorizing make a number of contributions to the existing literature, in both the leisure and family domains. Most fundamentally, this work encourages the intersection of these two domains and incorporates theoretical and empirical work from both leisure and family scholars. The current analysis expands the scope of study of family leisure by including the voices of multiple generations and reflects the experiences of grandmothers, grandfathers, adult granddaughters, and adult grandsons. The theorizing outlined here suggests that intergenerational ambivalence and intergenerational stake are important theoretical concepts to consider when examining the experience of intergenerational family leisure among grandparents and their adult grandchildren. In exploring the theoretical parallels that exist within the leisure and family disciplines, this study addresses the criticism of the family leisure literature as lacking in theoretical breadth. Leisure and family scholars will benefit from closer collaboration, especially given the multiple, intersecting roles of work, leisure, and family, as outlined by Kelly and Kelly (1994). Based on the findings from the current study, leisure appears to play an essential role in family relations and is implicated in family members' abilities to cope with ambivalence in the intergenerational relationship. The intricacies of leisure in the grandparent-grandchild relationship should not be ignored. Leisure is a central feature of intergenerational relationships between grandparents and adult grandchildren.

This research, therefore, presents a preliminary explanation of the experience of ambivalence in intergenerational family leisure among grandparents and their adult children. This study expands the existing literature by providing a rich description of the experiences of the 16 grandparents and their adult grandchildren who shared their stories with us. In approaching the study on intergenerational family leisure from within a social constructionist epistemology, the construction of meaning that occurs between grandparents and grandchildren has been emphasized. This has allowed for the expression and analysis of both consensual and conflictual aspects of family leisure. Given the voluntary nature of the study, however, these participants may reflect more consensual, emotionally close grandparent-grandchild dyads. Future research should endeavor to include more diverse samples, including families from different cultures, geographical regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and education levels. The impact of gender should also be examined in a more balanced sample, particularly including more grandsons. Lastly, this sample was purposive in its focus on grandparents who were not primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Custodial grandparenting is becoming increasingly prevalent, although more so in the United States than in Canada (Kemp, 2003). A substantial amount of literature has focused on the benefits of this type of relationship and on the many challenges faced by all three genera-

tions that are affected by this situation (Mills, 2001). It is important to understand the role that family leisure plays in both custodial and non-custodial grandparents. Given the parental role that is expected of custodial grandparents, these individuals may experience family leisure quite differently from the grandparents who participated in the current study. Comparisons among custodial and non-custodial grandparents would be an important addition to the current state of knowledge about intergenerational relations.

Practical implications also arise from the current findings. This research supports the need for opportunities for intergenerational leisure and the importance of educating families about both the consensual and conflictual aspects of intergenerational relationships. Facilitating intergenerational programming can assist in bringing multiple generations together to share their experiences and knowledge. Leisure education could help to normalize the feelings of ambivalence that so often occur in intergenerational relationships and decrease the guilt and frustration that often accompanies this ambivalence. By educating families about the role that leisure can play in tempering this ambivalence, we can encourage this intergenerational interaction, especially among emerging adults and their grandparents. Family leisure interventions should expand their scope beyond the nuclear family and include older adults in the process. This may include interventions in both the public and private sectors, from tourism to municipal recreation to long-term care. Both family and leisure practitioners and scholars should attend to the increasingly prevalent dyads of grandparents and adult grandchildren and the relationship that exists between these generations. With increased longevity, understanding the relationship between multiple generations of adults will become increasingly relevant. The current study has expanded the research beyond simply understanding whether grandparents and adult grandchildren participate together in family leisure and has facilitated a better understanding of what these experiences are and ultimately how family leisure can affect the experience of intergenerational ambivalence.

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